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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: MEDVEDEV APPROVES EXPANDED COOPERATION ON
AFGHANISTAN, LAVROV VISITS KABUL

REF: MOSCOW 416

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) Summary: President Medvedev has approved a proposal by FM Lavrov to expand Russian cooperation with the U.S. and NATO to stabilize Afghanistan. Lavrov made the formal proposal to Medvedev following his successful first meeting with Secretary Clinton, drawing the suggested areas for cooperation from our recent bilateral consultations on Afghanistan. The FM plans to lay out Russian intentions during the March 31 conference on Afghanistan in the Hague, and will propose that Russia be included in future meetings of contributors to ISAF. The Afghans responded positively to the GOR's plan to expand Russia's role in Afghan stabilization during Lavrov's March 16 visit to Kabul, according to the MFA. Lavrov agreed to an Afghan request to provide the National Police with AK-47s, although the GOR has not determined through what means to supply the weapons. Lavrov urged the Afghans to overcome their differences regarding the timing of the Presidential election, and said it was crucial that Karzai be allowed to serve as interim President, should there be a gap in Presidential terms. Russia does not see an alternative to another Karzai presidency, despite frustrations with the Afghan leader, and is concerned that the Taliban's formation of a shadow government indicates that national reconciliation will not work and the Taliban intend a full return to power. End summary.

Medvedev Signs-off on Expanded Cooperation on Afghanistan

12. (C) Acting MFA Afghan desk chief Vitaly Rugalyov told us on March 24 that President Medvedev had approved a letter from FM Lavrov proposing specific areas for increased Russian cooperation with the U.S. and NATO to stabilize Afghanistan. Lavrov determined to take this formal step after his March 6 meeting with Secretary Clinton, who had convinced Lavrov that the U.S. welcomed a Russian role with her overview of the situation in Afghanistan and explanation of the Administration's policy review. The areas Lavrov specified to Medvedev for enhanced cooperation were the NATO transit agreement, counter-narcotics efforts, and infrastructure and development projects in Afghanistan, which had been discussed during the February bilateral consultations on Afghanistan in Moscow (reftel). Rugalyov said Lavrov would raise these issues during the March 31 International Conference on Afghanistan in the Hague.

No Hard Feelings Over Hague Conference

13. (C) Rugalyov explained that the GOR considered the Hague conference a U.S. initiative, particularly after they first learned of it from a speech by the Secretary. The timing of the event, on the heels of the March 27 Russian-hosted

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) conference on Afghanistan, had raised suspicion within the MFA department responsible for the SCO that this was a deliberate U.S. attempt to draw attention from the Russian event, but those responsible for Afghanistan policy argued that the signals from Washington, which included sending a delegation to the SCO conference, suggested otherwise. This viewpoint prevailed, and Lavrov indicated that he saw the SCO conference as an event narrowly focused on addressing threats to Afghanistan's neighbors that would result in a SCO action plan, whereas the Hague conference would cover Afghanistan more globally and allow for broader discussion of Russian cooperation with the U.S. and NATO (septel).

14. (C) According to Rugalyov, Lavrov will use his appearance at the Hague conference to reiterate that as Russia's support for the NATO role in Afghanistan increases, Russia should be included in meetings of contributors to ISAF, which includes non-troop contributing countries such as Japan (reftel). The GOR believes this forum could avoid misunderstandings by acting as a mechanism to discuss Russian support for ISAF and Kabul.

Lavrov's Trip to Kabul

15. (C) Rugalyov said that during Lavrov's March 16 trip to Kabul, the Afghans responded positively to the prospect of increased Russian support for Afghan stabilization. The Russians were concerned, however, by some of the "naive" requests made by the Afghans, such as for Moscow to provide Kabul direct budgetary support. Rugalyov said that Russia

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preferred to funnel aid through international organizations to ensure accountability and avoid the money disappearing as a result of Afghan corruption. The GOR would consider providing assistance along the lines of the \$2 million it gave to the World Bank in 2008 to support Afghan education programs.

Russia Will Provide AK-47s

16. (C) Rugalyov confirmed that Russia would supply the Afghan National Police (ANP) with AK-47s in response to a request made to Lavrov in Kabul by Minister of the Interior Atmar, but had yet to determine how the weapons would be supplied to the ANP. In response to our question about possible Russian arms donations to Afghanistan, Rugalyov reiterated that the Russian Ministry of Defense preferred arms sales, a position taken in response to the purchase of non-licensed AK-47s for the Afghans from Eastern Europe and possibly China. When we explained that the vast majority of weapons, including AK-47s, were donated to the Afghans and not purchased, Rugalyov responded that Russian sources suggested otherwise.

Russia on Afghan Presidential Election

17. (C) Rugalyov explained that during Lavrov's March 16 meetings with Karzai, FM Spanta, MinInt Atmar, and parliamentary leaders, he explained that Russia would not take a position on potential presidential candidates, but did urge Karzai and Parliament to overcome their differences and go forward with the election as originally scheduled. Their quarrels would only be exploited by the Taliban, which would argue (with some truth, in the GOR's assessment) that leaders in Kabul were more concerned with their own political fortunes than the state of the country. Should there be a gap between the end of Karzai's term and a new presidential term, Lavrov urged that Karzai be allowed to serve as interim President in order to avoid a leadership vacuum that could be exploited by the Taliban.

18. (C) Rugalyov told us that the GOR presently saw no

realistic alternative to Karzai, despite Moscow's concerns with what it characterized as his unwillingness to tackle the insurgency head on. The GOR was impressed by MinInt Atmar, who had proven himself a capable manager in confronting substantial challenges in the MOI. The GOR was not sure, however, whether he was ready to take on the political responsibilities of President, and Atmar made no indication to Lavrov that he was considering running.

Russians Think Afghans Skeptical of Reconciliation

19. (C) Rugalyov thought that the Afghans were coming round to the Russian argument that national reconciliation would allow the Taliban to return to power. While in Kabul, Lavrov raised Russian concern with reports that the Taliban had established a shadow government, which indicated that the insurgents had no intention of negotiating with Kabul and wanted to return to full power. The GOR thought it particularly troubling that the shadow Minister of Finance was an Al-Quaeda representative. According to Rugalyov, the Afghans accepted Lavrov's assessment and appeared to be moving closer to the Russian position that supposed reformed senior Taliban should not be allowed into the central government. Speaker of the Upper House of Parliament and head of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission Mojaddedi indicated to Lavrov that he was skeptical national reconciliation could work.

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